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ABSTRACT

Developed as part of a project to integrate youth with disabilities into regular recreational and leisure activities, this report attempted to identify several programs and specific types of leisure activities that children, adolescents, and young adults with and without disabilities can enjoy together regardless of skill level. Case studies are provided to illustrate successful integration in several programs and activities. Programs discussed include: the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), Boy and Girl Scouts, 4-H, parks and recreation programs, community soccer leagues, community theater groups, programs of the Association for Retarded Citizens, social integration at school, friendship clubs (composed of nondisabled students interested in becoming involved with students having disabilities), integration during school activity periods, lunch buddies, summer friendship/outing groups, school sports teams, programs for older students (ages 18-22), college fraternities and sororities, and the "Best Buddies of America" program (which fosters friendships between college students and people with mental retardation). Tips for getting started stress knowing the resources of the specific community and concentrating on fun rather than skill development. (Contains 11 references.) (DB)

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ED 369 203

Finding or Creating the Fun in Your Community or School: Places and Ways to Integrate Recreation Programs

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Training and Research Institute for People with Disabilities

Boston, Massachusetts

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Finding or Creating the Fun in Your Community or School: Places and Ways to Integrate Recreation Programs

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Finding or Creating the "Fun" in Your Community:

The major aspects of any leisure activity should be its emphasis on fun and participation rather than on education, work, treatment, or other forms of skill development. The Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (1977) defines leisure as freedom provided by the cessation of activities or time free from work or duties. Accordingly, leisure or recreation participation should no necessarily require a certain skill level or ability if it is enjoyable for the persons involved (Moon & Bunker, 1987). Just as participation should not always require prerequisite skills, all leisure activities should not demand a great deal of money or exceptional supervision or expertise (Schleien & Ray, 1988). These particular aspects of certain leisure programs tend to make them more desirable for people with severe disabilities and their families.

The purpose of this paper is to identify several programs and specific types of leisure activities that children, adolescents, and young adults with and without disabilities can enjoy together regardless of skill level. Activities chosen for this paper were included because they can be done across a variety of settings, without large amounts of money, and they don't require staff with professional expertise. If a teacher, family member, recreation professional, or volunteer wanted to initiate a program similar to one of the programs discussed in this paper, doing so should be relatively easy.

Some of the activities or programs described in this paper already exist within many schools and community organizations. These include swimming and aerobics classes at the local YMCA and Girl or Boy Scout troops of various levels. Other programs such as the friendship club or activity period may have to be initiated by somebody who is willing to put in a little organizational or supervisory time in the beginning stages. Whenever possible, it is best to try to get people with severe disabilities involved in existing programs. However, sometimes enjoyable activities have to be created in order for citizens with and without disabilities to be brought together. This is particularly true during difficult economic times when school extracurricular programs and free community activities have been curtailed for everyone. Our philosophy is to do whatever you can with what exists and to create what you need to. As long as the participants seem to enjoy it, nothing else is that important.

One of the initial steps in deciding which leisure activities may be appropriate for a person with a disability involves finding out what others his or her own age may be doing in that community. Then, that person's preferences can be evaluated or developed within the context of actually participating in these "age-appropriate" programs. This ecological approach to leisure participation has been described in detail elsewhere (Schlein & Ray, 1988; Wehman & Schleien, 1981).

You will probably find a number of existing programs in any given community that may be enjoyable for children, adolescents, and young adults with severe disabilities. These programs can include scout troops, 4-H clubs, school sororities or fraternities, YMCA classes, parks and recreation programs, or community sports teams like youth soccer. The information in this text should help prepare you to effectively approach these or similar school or community groups about a particular person joining the activity. In most cases, confidence in the participant and a commitment to help that person get acquainted with the targeted program is all that's needed for successful integration. The examples provided here show how some individuals have benefitted from joining certain school or community classes, organizations, or teams.

The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA)

This organization, which is oriented to neighborhood and family needs, is open to anyone, regardless of race, creed, or religious affiliation, who can pay the initiation and yearly membership fees. There are branches all over the country, and most major metropolitan and suburban areas have several branches oriented to the particular neighborhood where they are located. YMCA's typically have pools, workout areas, racquet courts, and classes in many individual and team sports. Many offer day-care and after school programs, summer day camps, and some programs for elder citizens. Classes or field trips may be offered in cultural activities, arts and crafts, or self-help areas.

Usually, nonmembers can register for classes at a fee higher than members would pay, and often nonmembers can use the facility for a one time fee.

Traditionally, YMCA's offer a few separate classes or programs for children with disabilities. However, they are also very open to integrating other programs when approached. If you have difficulty locating a YMCA near your home contact: National YMCA, Program Services Division, 101 N. Wacker Drive, Chicago, Illinois 60606.

A YMCA Case Study

Bobby was an eleven year old diagnosed as having severe mental retardation and cerebral palsy. He would not communicate verbally with the exception of asking for "more", and sometimes answering yes or no. He was small for his age and had some difficulty walking because of mild cerebral palsy. The special classroom Bobby attended at the time of his participation at the YMCA was located in a town approximately 20 miles away from his neighborhood, and his commute to and from school took approximately one hour.

Bobby's teacher heard about a project which provided assistance in getting children with disabilities involved in after school and weekend recreation activities. This project used a recreation facilitator to help families find and use community activities. Because of numerous discussion with Bobby's mother, the teacher was aware that Bobby's main activity outside of school was watching television. Both his teacher and mother

agreed that Bobby would benefit both physically and socially from some sort of active recreation with other children in the community. At this point the teacher contacted the facilitator for assistance.

In order to discover what activities Bobby most enjoyed, the facilitator met with his teacher, mother, and adaptive physical educator. The teacher identified which activities he seemed most eager to participate in during school and the parent discussed things he seemed to enjoy doing with the family. The adaptive physical education instructor discussed Bobby's physical and motor strengths and preferences. Finally, Bobby was observed during and after school to discover what activities he most seemed to enjoy. Since he constantly laughed during his weekly class swimming trip, and a YMCA pool was located less than 10 minutes from his house, Bobby was asked by the recreation facilitator if he would like to swim with her sometime. The next three times she saw Bobby, he asked to go swimming by making a swimming motion with his arms. As a result, swimming was the activity chosen. At this point the facilitator, teacher, and mother worked out a "team strategy" for approaching the local YMCA.

Bobby's mother contacted the YMCA and requested that a program brochure be sent to her. After reading the brochure, she found two options for Bobby. He could become a member of the YMCA and participate in open recreational swims (offered about 9 times a week for children) and get reduced rates for group

lessons, or he could just enroll in the lessons and pay a slightly higher fee. After several phone conversations with the pool director, during which time she was assured that the recreation facilitator or teacher would attend lessons with Bobby, Bobby's mother was able to register him in a beginning swimmers' group which met one time a week for a period of eight weeks.

In the beginning, the swimming instructors were very nervous about having Bobby in their class of 12 children ranging in age from 7 to 11. In addition to Bobby's class, there were two other classes with approximately 10 children each using the pool at the same time. The instructors had many children to watch and were afraid that Bobby, who did not hold his breath under water, would be in a dangerous situation. They requested that the teacher or facilitator be near him at all times. However, through reassuring answers to all of their questions and constant reminders as to how much fun Bobby was having (the smile on his face being enough), the regular instructors very quickly became much more comfortable and the extra person they requested was able to move further and further away from the group. The teacher or facilitator stayed nearby only because of the large number of children in the pool during lessons. Everyone agreed that extra support would not have been needed during free swims or had life-vests been permitted.

When Bobby completed his lessons at the YMCA, he went swimming several time with his class at school. His adaptive

physical education instructor commented that he seemed to feel much more confident in the water and had become totally independent with floaters (small life-preservers that fit around arms or waist) on. Furthermore, he was no longer afraid to have his head underwater, something he had never done in the several years he had been swimming with his parents and physical education teacher.

After the lessons were completed, Bobby's mother expressed an interest in registering him for more lessons in the future. She was encouraged by the pool staff at the YMCA to get him an annual membership to the YMCA which would enable him to take lessons at a discounted rate as well as use the pool with other children during free swim times. Bobby's mother decided to purchase a membership for both Bobby and his sister with the reassurance that the school, local ARC, and the recreation facilitator would assist the family in locating volunteers to swim with Bobby. With the help of Bobby's swimming instructor from the YMCA, Bobby was able to get a special notation on his membership which allowed him to bring in one person to swim with him at no additional charge (since he was not yet able to swim independently).

After observing Bobby on several occasions while he was swimming with a volunteer, Bobby's mother also expressed an interest in taking him swimming, something they had previously not done together. Finally, because of their positive experiences with the pool staff at the YMCA, Bobby's parents are

considering registering him for summer camp at the YMCA this summer.

Scouting - Boys and Girls

The Boy Scouts of America's mission is to train and involve boys and young men ages 8 to 20 in the responsibilities of participating as citizens in the community. It is divided into a three part progressive experience: Cub Scouting, Boy Scouting, and Exploring. Cub Scouting is a neighborhood and family centered program for boys ages 8 to 10. The 10 year olds usually becoming Webelos Scouts, a group designed to transition youth to the more advanced Boy Scouts. Cub Scouts belong to small dens (usually 4 to 10 boys) and a larger community pack which meets less frequently and consists of many dens. They usually work on home based projects such as arts and crafts. Boy Scouting is for boys ages 11 to 17 and is usually outdoor oriented and includes camping and hiking away from home. Boy Scouts meet in troops which usually include 10 to 20 boys. Finally, Exploring is for young men and women ages 15 to 20 and is directed away from the home. Explorer posts are organized to give members experience in special interests, usually professions, businesses, or hobbies, and the number of youth involved varies greatly. In addition, there are also special troops for children who have disabilities. However, the National Boy Scout Office encourages all children to belong to regular troops.

The Girl Scouts' mission is similar to that of the Boy Scouts and is for girls and young women ages 5 to 18. However,

Girl Scouts revolves around members' planning, and anything that is healthy, safe and fun may be considered for a focus for any given troop. Therefore, although the badges they work toward and certain national fundraising activities are the same, each group in each town may be drastically different.

Girl Scouts is split into five levels based on school grade or age. Girls in kindergarten join Daisy's and grades one through three join Brownies. When girls join Brownies they are encouraged to work toward "tryits." These are patches the members can earn by trying certain activities. At the Junior level of Girl Scouts (grades four, five and six) girls may begin working on merit badges or patches earned for trying and actually succeeding or improving in certain activities (e.g., the swimming badge requires learning certain strokes and safety procedures). Although girls are often encouraged to work toward badges, it is not a requirement. Finally, Cadettes are in seventh through ninth grade and Seniors continue to the end of high school.

Both Boy and Girl Scouts are national organizations which, on both the local and national levels, utilize thousands of volunteers. Both groups employ field directors, especially in larger cities, which ensure that scouting is offered to all children in a given local area. Leaders of the packs, troops, and posts are volunteers, who may be parents, college students, or other members of the community. All receive support from the local office which in turn receives support from the national office. Both Boy and Girl Scouts offer school year programs

usually meeting weekly. Summer programs consist primarily of camps. Boy Scout camps are usually attended by the troop as a unit, yet individual boys may register. Girl Scout camps are usually attended by individual girls even if they do not participate in Girl Scouts throughout the year.

To become involved in local scouting, one should look in the phone book under Girl Scouts or Boy Scouts. If no local office is available, contact: Boy Scouts of America, 1325 West Walnut Hill Lane, POB 152079, Irving, TX 75015-2079 or Girl Scouts of the United States of America, 830 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10022.

A Girl Scout Case Study

Sarah was an 11 year old girl diagnosed as having severe mental retardation as well as cerebral palsy. She was able to laugh or cry to indicate her level of enjoyment. Sarah used a wheelchair, and according to her teacher, she could not really push herself anywhere without someone assisting her.

Sarah's teacher contacted the regional scout office to see if she could join a local troop. She had noticed that Sarah responded well to nondisabled students when they came in to volunteer in her class. Several of these students were Girl Scouts and Sarah's teacher felt she might really enjoy participating in afterschool activities with them.

Sarah's parents were hesitant about having Sarah join the Girl Scouts. Initially, they did not believe that Sarah would benefit from such an activity, and they were worried that it

wouldn't fit into their own hectic schedules. However, they were willing to give it a try.

Two teenage student volunteers were located through a local high school volunteer organization to take Sarah to a wide variety of activities twice monthly in order to discover what activities she most enjoyed and to provide her with the widest variety of choice available. After going to approximately 10 activities offered in her community, Sarah seemed to enjoy Girl Scouts the most, evidenced by her constant laughter during the weekly meetings. Once Sarah's parents heard the positive reaction of the leaders, saw how readily Sarah was accepted by the other girls in the troop, and witnessed Sarah's reaction to the meetings, they overcame their reservations about the activity, and Sarah became a Girl Scout. The troop, which included the volunteers from Sarah's school, had two leaders. One of the leaders was excited about having Sarah in the troop, while the other had reservations. The second leader's hesitancy was addressed by the other leader, the teacher, and by the local field director. Because so many people were certain that Sarah would fit in with the other scouts, the hesitant leader soon became comfortable with the idea.

Before Sarah joined the group, the leaders discussed disabilities and Sarah's particular disability with the six other members, making sure that all their questions were answered and their fears laid to rest. Because some of the girls were still concerned that Sarah would change the troop and perhaps slow them

down, Sarah's teacher attended a second meeting to discuss disability in more detail and talk about inclusion and what that would mean for both Sarah and for the troop. Sarah attended her first four meetings accompanied by her teacher, who was able to provide support by making sure that Sarah was included in activities and by encouraging the other girls to interact with Sarah. After that the teacher attended every other meeting and discussed ways in which support for Sarah might be given by the leaders and other troop members. The teacher usually just talked to individual troop members whenever she saw a simple thing that could be done to assist or include Sarah.

During the meetings the group noticed that Sarah was able to push herself without assistance. Often Sarah would push her wheelchair toward the loud laughter and conversation of the other girls or to see an activity that a group was participating in. Furthermore, members who knew Sarah from school commented that she seemed to be much happier at Girl Scout meetings, where she was most often laughing or smiling, than at school where she was crying more often than not. It became evident through her reactions that Sarah preferred the conversation and play of her nondisabled peers to that of her classmates who were also disabled and for the most part, nonverbal.

Eventually, Sarah moved to a school for older children much further from her own community and her scout troop. Although the troop offered to change their meeting times to the evening (vs. after school) so that Sarah would be able to attend, her parents

felt that she would be too tired after a day of school and the long ride home to go to a Girl Scout meeting. However, as a result of Sarah's positive experience with the troop, Sarah's parents began researching the possibility of Girl Scout summer day camp as an option for Sarah. Now, attending Girl Scout camp during the summer has enabled Sarah to see her old friends and to meet new ones.

A Boy Scout Case Study

Erik was a 15 year old eighth grader who had Down Syndrome. He attended junior high school in his neighborhood together with his nondisabled peers. Although Erik had been mainstreamed in school his entire life, the director of special education in his town was concerned that he had not been socially integrated with his peers outside of school. The special education director, after securing permission from Erik's parents, asked the recreation coordinator of the local ARC to help find an activity in which Erik could participate with other teenagers.

Several phone conversations were held with Erik and his parents to discuss what types of activities might interest him. Erik was interested in meeting with other people his own age, preferably males, in a formal activity at least one time a week without the assistance of his mother or father. Two activities were found in the vicinity which met these requirements, a Boy Scout troop and a junior high monthly social gathering. Erik decided to choose only one of these activities because his Special Olympics training was keeping him quite busy and he (and

his parents) did not wish to commit to too many after school activities.

The recreation coordinator was able to get the number of the leader of a Boy Scout troop quite close to Erik's house through the regional Boy Scout office. Several conversations were held with the troop leader and he requested that some information about disability awareness be provided to the 17 boys, ages 12 to 16 in his troop. The coordinator attended the next meeting where people with disabilities were discussed. The boys were encouraged to ask questions and voice any concerns they might have about a troop member who was different in some ways. Questions asked included the following: Will I catch it? Do we have to be nice to him? Why is he joining? What if he can't keep up? How should I talk to him? What do I do if he does something that bothers me? Several of the boys indicated that they knew Erik from school and were excited about having him as a new member.

The recreation coordinator attended the first two meetings with Erik to reassure the troop leader who was nervous about Erik's inclusion with the other boys. Further support was offered to the leader, yet after two meetings he felt confident about his and his troop's abilities to include Erik as a full member. After the first meeting, Erik's parents informed the leader of the troop that Erik was on the International Special Olympics Swim Team, and they feared that there might be some conflict between swimming practice and the Boy Scout meetings.

It was made clear to them and Erik by the leader and a senior patrol member (an older Boy Scout) that the Boy Scouts expected a commitment if Erik decided to join. However, it was acceptable to the leader if Erik were to come half an hour late to each two hour meeting if there was a conflict with swimming practice.

Erik attended five Boy Scout meetings before deciding not to join the troop. Although Erik enjoyed the troop, it was taking up a substantial part of his time (a weekly two hour meeting in addition to outside time spent working on badges), and he had to choose between Scouts and Special Olympics. According to his parents, this was the first time Erik had made a decision like this independently, and in the future they would feel confident about his ability to make informed choices about his leisure time. A year later Erik expressed an interest in becoming a Scout. At that point he joined the same troop and gave up Special Olympics.

4-H

4-H has traditionally assisted children and youth in learning life skills through agriculture. Today, however, 4-H offers a wider variety of activities for school age youth. Although they still maintain clubs which are primarily based around caring for and showing animals (e.g. horse clubs, sheep clubs, rabbit clubs), 4-H has numerous activities which address the needs of students within their city/town. Surprisingly, 4-H exists in most urban and even inner city settings. Some examples include clubs based around rocketry, computer science, double

dutch (jump rope), gardening, home economics, arts and crafts, and public speaking. Each club is based around a small group of youth with an interest in a specific topic and an adult volunteer leader. Depending on their interest area the club may have both competitive (e.g. working toward showing animals in a county fair) as well as cooperative activities (e.g. performing science experiments as a group). In addition, 4-H may provide leadership training or other types of short-term workshops to local high school students within the schools.

To locate the 4-H group nearest you, look under "Four-H" in the phone book. If you cannot find a group in your area, the National 4-H Center will assist you in finding a group, beginning a group, or working on a 4-H program within your family. Contact the National 4-H Center, 7100 Connecticut Avenue, Chevy Chase, MD 20815.

A 4-H Case Study

Freddy was a 11 year old girl diagnosed with severe developmental delays. She was able to laugh or cry to indicate her level of enjoyment, and used a wheelchair. Freddy attended a school in her own community, but was in a separate class for students with severe disabilities.

Her teacher contacted a community recreation liaison to see what Freddy's options were for joining a community activity. After discussions with Freddy's teacher and parents, it was decided that it would be best to arrange for her to experience a

wide variety of activities so that she could try to express a preference for certain types of events.

The 4-H club in Freddy's town ran a small farm with sheep, cows, goats and rabbits. The members of 4-H ranged in age from 5 to 18 and took full responsibility for the care of the animals. Each member set up his/her own contract for when he/she would care for the animals. After several phone discussions between the 4-H director and the recreation liaison, the director decided that the best time for Freddy to participate (at least to begin with) would be on Saturday mornings when all of the children participated as a large group of 20 kids. The director was initially quite skeptical about Freddy's ability to participate, but was reassured by the fact that high school volunteers would be available to assist Freddy so that she could be an active participant with other students. He also requested that either a parent or the recreation liaison attend the first Saturday meeting.

Freddy attended three 4-H meetings where she was able to help feed and groom the animals, as well as socialize with the other children who were very eager to include her. Although Freddy seemed to enjoy the 4-H Club, the animals, and other children, her parents decided they wanted her to try other activities and come back to 4-H if that seemed to be the one she most enjoyed. Freddy did not join 4-H that year as several other activities were found which were more convenient for her family. However, the leaders of the club realized that children with

disabilities could participate in their group and began to encourage other children with disabilities to become members. After trying several other activities, Freddy joined 4-H later that year.

Parks and Recreation Programs

Departments, commissions, and offices of parks and recreation can be found in many municipalities or counties across the country. These offices are usually supported by the city or town with state and/or federal monies. They are often affiliated with the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) which is a national, nonprofit service organization dedicated to promoting the importance of parks and recreation and to ensuring that all citizens have an opportunity to find the most satisfying leisure activities. Recreation departments vary in size, depending on the ability and commitment of the locality to providing recreation services. They may be responsible for a variety of activities from maintaining local parks to offering year round programs including summer camps and day care. Departments may employ professional recreation personnel or utilize other paid or volunteer staff to operate particular programs.

Because city parks and recreation departments are so diverse, it is impossible to include all the possibilities of every office in every city and state. However, if one looks in the blue pages in the phone book or calls a local governing office (e.g., a city/town hall, Chamber of Commerce), one will be able to discover if a recreation office exists in their

community. Even if the department does not run programs, they often have schedules of city wide events, especially those that take place on public property (e.g., parades, concerts, park events). Many departments have pools and provide swimming classes and recreational swim opportunities. As well, they can provide at relatively low costs sports and exercise teams and classes, arts and crafts lessons, field trips, and a variety of self-help activities.

Larger parks and recreation programs have specialists trained in therapeutic recreation services. They provide a variety of programs for people with disabilities from separate camps and classes to fully inclusive programs such as summer day camp, swimming lessons, and aerobic classes. More progressive programs may have recreation liaisons or facilitators who can assist citizens with disabilities find integrated, community leisure activities.

You can contact the National Recreation and Park Association at 2775 South Quincy Street, Suite 300, Arlington 22206-2204 to identify programs that are available on a local, regional, or national level.

Community Soccer Leagues

The world's most popular sport, soccer, has finally become the sport of choice for many school-aged children and their families across the United States. It has caught on because both boys and girls can play, it is not as dangerous as some popular sports like football, and nearly all kids can participate in the

game regardless of skill level. It is also appropriate across all ages. Soccer leagues have sprung up everywhere and are sponsored by school systems, parks and recreation programs, churches, YMCA's and private organizations. Soccer leagues may include a variety of programs from competitive teams at different age levels to skill building clinics. Because this is one of the major after school activities for many young children, it is a great place for elementary aged students with disabilities to "play" with kids who are not disabled.

One large suburban soccer league in Maryland, Montgomery Soccer, Inc., has opened its doors to children with disabilities by inviting all children aged 6 to 9 with disabilities to participate in the spring clinic which is held on four Saturdays in April and May. The league board composed a letter to parents that was distributed in all special education classes during January. Those who were interested returned the letter and the special education coordinator helped the board determine which clinic or team each child with a disability should be assigned to. This depended on where the family lived, the physical and motor characteristics of the child, and the openness of certain team or clinic instructors. Several volunteers, primarily special education teachers, agreed to provide extra support during the clinics. A special education professor at a local university agreed to provide some disability awareness training to the league's executive board and coaches and recruited several

college students to volunteer on Saturdays as facilitator to the players with disabilities.

A Soccer and a Parks and Recreation Case Study

Sam was a five year old who had autism. He also had a difficult time playing with children his own age. He attended a segregated pre-school program but spent one hour, two days a week in a regular kindergarten class. Sam's teacher and parents wanted him to spend more time in active play with children who were not disabled. He loved outdoor activities and had good motor skills such as running, kicking, and throwing a ball.

Sam's teacher told his parents about the city recreation department's soccer program that ran for ten weeks. The program consisted of teams of fifteen kids aged five to eight. The first two sessions involved skill instruction and the remaining sessions were team play.

Sam appeared to enjoy playing soccer because he would talk about it during the week. However, he had some difficulty picking up the basic skills such as dribbling, passing and figuring out who his team mates were, although these were common problem for most of the five and six year olds. Sam's parents felt that he could use a little "tutoring" to help him acquire these skills. A high school student was found who was on the soccer team and was interested in working with Sam. The student volunteer met with him once a week and they worked on a variety of skills. They got along well together and Sam made significant progress. The student volunteer felt that it would be helpful if

Sam had other kids to practice with so Sam's parents contacted other parents involved in the YMCA soccer program to determine if they would be interested in having their child participate in this type of activity once the original soccer program ended. Several expressed an interest, so a group was organized that met once a week at a local high school after the YMCA league had ended for the season. The team was coached by the student volunteer and was made up of twelve nondisabled children ages five through eight and two new children with disabilities, ages five and eight. They spent a half hour doing some skill building games and exercises, and a half hour of team play. The group met for two months through the summer and Same made progress in both his soccer game and his socialization. He seemed to be at ease with these children and when the new soccer program began again Sam was able to participate without any extra support.

Community Theater Groups

Organized theater groups exist in many communities across the country. Productions generally run throughout the year with children's groups occurring during the summer. Membership in the theater group often requires no previous experience. Community members of all ages participate in these productions either on stage, behind the scenes working on props, scenery construction, painting, or costumes. Theater groups depend on the community for both the production and financial support of the show. As a result, community participation by any interested citizen is strongly encouraged. Participation in community theater groups

can be fun for an individual with a disability of any age, but it can be an especially good activity for young adults whose formal recreation options become limited when they leave school. You can find out about local theater groups by calling the drama department at the local public school or checking in the local paper for community events and organizations. As well, many parks and recreation departments sponsor or work with community theater groups.

A Theater Group Case Study

Maggie was a twenty two year old with severe mental retardation and visual impairments who had just graduated from a special public school for students with severe disabilities. She enjoyed watching TV and a variety of arts and crafts which she did with her mother and older sister. Maggie did not have a job and missed seeing her friends from school. She enjoyed attending church on Sundays and often talked to several of the members about TV show that she had viewed during the previous week. One of these people happened to be an actor in a local amateur theater group and thought that Maggie might enjoy going with her to play practice during the next several weeks. Maggie's mom knew that this would be a great opportunity for her to spend some time out of the house and away from the family.

Maggie soon began getting involved in set changes and wardrobe prep and she even acted in some group scenes. A local special education teacher who also acted in the company provided some disability awareness training to the cast and crew and

agreed to model for everyone how to appropriately interact with Maggie. Some of the things she showed them was how to tell Maggie to stay behind the scenes at the appropriate time and how to give her instructions or correct an error that she may make. Maggie was also given the chance to talk to the cast and crew about her disability. Everyone understood that the most important thing for Maggie was just to hang out and feel that she was part of the group.

Association for Retarded Citizens (ARC) Programs

The Association for Retarded Citizens (ARC) is a national advocacy organization that promotes the rights of citizens with disabilities. The ARC provides education and information to people with disabilities and their families as well as some direct services including vocational and recreational opportunities. Most ARC's have a local office with an executive director, professional staff, and a governing executive board. Funding comes from government and private sources, and some fee for service arrangements may exist for activities such as summer camp programs. State and national ARC offices help local affiliates meet their programmatic objectives.

Some ARC's have hired leisure specialists to initiate integrated recreation programs in their communities. A variety of opportunities may be sponsored by a local ARC from after school day care, Saturday sports programs, and summer camps to programs that send community liaisons to families to help identify specific activities for individual children. ARC's are

a great source of support for finding volunteers or peer support networks. They usually also have information on other local service providers, volunteer agencies, and general community organizations. Their main job is to help citizens with disabilities and their families get the support they need, whatever that may be.

The national ARC is very concerned about the promotion of integrated recreational and educational opportunities. For example, they cosponsored along with National 4-H, the publication of Together Successfully, a manual providing integrated recreation strategies and guidelines. This manual edited by John Rynders and Stuart Schleien is available from the ARC for $12.50 and is an excellent resource for starting integrated activities. For this manual or other information write to: Association for Retarded Citizens of the United States, Publication Department, P. O. Box 1047, Arlington, TX76004.

Having Fun At School

Over the years we have discovered a number of ways for young children and teenagers with and without disabilities to socialize, play, and just hang out together. Specific instructional strategies and curricula adaptations (Rynders & Schleien, 1991), the role of families and professionals (Hamre-Nietupski, Nietupski, & Strathe, 1992), and even research showing the how social interactions can best be facilitated (Stainback & Stainback, 1987) are documented. As well, the effects of peer

tutoring, cooperative learning, disability awareness training (Meyer & Putman, 1986), and particular media such as books and movies have been shown. We know it works, and we know that, usually it is not even that hard to do. It simply takes some leadership from people who are committed to getting kids together.

An older student or adult who wants to start some integrated or social activities that include students with disabilities will find helpful ideas in the sources listed in this paper or from any number of other materials. However, it really doesn't take any special expertise, training, or experience to get kids together to have fun. The main elements include using common sense, getting permission from the right "authorities" such as parents and school personnel, knowing all medical or physical needs of the participants, and providing some basic training to participants on what to do in certain emergency situations.

There is not a best or right way to get kids together. What you do will depend on the numbers of students, experience of the leaders and participants, desires of the families, resources in the school and community, and philosophy of the general and special education programs. If your main purpose is just to give students the chance to get to know each other and have a little fun, almost anything can be a success. Trust the kids. They usually know what to do! However, if you're still looking for some specific suggestions or a framework for some school based leisure programs, the following activities may be good for you.

Friendship Clubs

Friendship clubs are composed of students who are nondisabled and are interested in becoming involved in varied relationships with students with disabilities. This type of activity can become part of an existing club or can be easily initiated as a new club in most schools. It provides a natural environment for promoting friendships between students with disabilities and their nondisabled peers.

The club can be organized by students, teachers, or responsible persons outside the school, and can occur from elementary through college years. The teacher(s) can promote the club in the same manner as other extra curricular activities. One school's initial advertisement for members appears below (see Figure 1).

Club members should be involved in choosing the type of relationship they want to develop which may include: big brother/big sister, in school peer support during integrated nonacademic classes, participation in afterschool athletics and clubs, support during organized community activities, and informal "hanging out" in the community. Members who wish to develop relationships with students their own age must understand that these students are to be treated as peers and not as younger children. The organizing adult or student can involve teachers who work with younger students if club members are interested in developing big brother/big sister relationships. Students may

also need a couple of sessions on being friends so that they are reminded about the strengths or possible limitations of students with disabilities. They will typically need direct adult supervision or support in their initial meetings so that they can ask questions or get help with areas like behavior management or physical/medical issues.

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Insert Figure 1 About Here

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Case Study - Friendship Club

A teacher from a high school special education program was interested in getting her students more involved in "nonacademic" activities that occurred in the school. Her class was composed of eight students aged eleven to sixteen who had mental retardation. The students spent their day in the classroom and community working on functional academics, such as budgeting, shopping, and recognizing certain sight words, community, and vocational skills. The classroom teacher met with the physical education teacher who was very adept at including students with disabilities in the physical education program. As a result, both teachers felt that a peer support network could assist the students with disabilities in being integrated into classes and activities without much difficulty or need for extra staff support. The classroom teacher then spoke with her students

about attending integrated classes and all but one were interested.

The classroom and physical education teacher decided to start a "Friendship Club" that provided this type of peer support. After getting clearance from the principal, they put up posters around the school advertising the club and a meeting date. Eighty students attended the first meeting. Some students discontinued their participation after the first meeting leaving the teachers with a core group of thirty students. These students provided the teachers with a list of their nonacademic classes and activities (e.g., physical education, art, home economics, and shop) in order to arrange the schedules of the students with disabilities to coincide with the schedules of the club members. The majority of students elected to approach their regular classroom teachers to ensure it was alright for the student with a disability to join the class. Two of the students did not feel comfortable doing this, so the teachers who organized the club approached these teachers. All of the teachers approached were very receptive to the idea.

Five of these students participated in at least one nonacademic class with a "friend". Two of the students also participated in afterschool sports programs (e.g., field hockey, soccer). Four of these relationships developed into friendships which continued outside the school for the students who lived in the same or a nearby community.

School Activity Periods

Some public schools enjoy giving their students an opportunity for extra enrichment with non-academic experiences led by the school faculty. Generally, these schools offer an activity period, usually on a weekly basis, with opportunities to change activities each quarter. Each teacher is asked to offer one activity which is usually hobby related (e.g., claywork, exercise, model building, various sports, creative writing, jewelry making, etc.), and each student is required to sign up for his or her first, second, and third choices for these non-graded activities. Students are then matched to activities, trying, of course, to give as many students as possible their first choices, but taking into account number limits teachers have set. Finally, once a week, the day is accelerated (e.g., instead of classes lasting 50 minutes, they are 40 minutes each) so there is one period remaining at the end of the day during which children go to their activities. This is an ideal time for students to gain and build lifetime leisure skills as well as get to know teachers and new students on a more social basis.

Often special education students are excluded from the activities, or a visit to their class may be offered as a "disability awareness" activity. However, it has been found that students with disabilities can participate fully in the regular activities with other students. This level of interaction provides the nondisabled student with more than a lesson on Disability Awareness. It provides a situation where

he or she can meet and get to know someone on a more equal level since everyone is being introduced to a new activity.

Case Study - Cole Middle School Activity Period

The Cole Middle School was the location of a special education classroom with five students ranging in age from 10 to 14. These students all had severe multiple disabilities. Three of the students were able to communicate by saying or signing yes and no and by pointing at pictures of emotions, activities, and items. The other two students were able to laugh or cry to indicate whether they enjoyed something or not. Three of the students were able to move about independently, while two were able to walk with assistance. Because this was a classroom belonging to a regional collaborative program, the students lived in towns from 45 to 60 minutes away.

The teacher of the class contacted a community recreation facilitator to ask her assistance in socially integrating some of her students with other children in the school. Although she understood that the likelihood of friendships carrying over to after school was low due to the distance most students lived from the school, the teacher felt it was important for the students in her class to develop relationships with their peers in the school and to have more normalized participation in school activities.

Once a week, the students at Cole participated in an activity period. One of the activities they could chose from was "Disability Awareness". During this activity, which had a limit of five participants, students would come into the special

education class and be paired, one-to-one, with a member of that class. They would then participate in activities together which often included tasks of daily living (e.g., sweeping, washing dishes). Although the students were able to interact with each other, it was on a trainer/trainee basis, and for the students in the special education class, the activities were nothing new or different.

With input from the facilitator, the teacher decided that she would try to have her students participate in the same activities as other students. However, she found that there were limited activities in which her students were able to participate as many of them were academically based (e.g., silent reading for fun), or physically competitive (e.g., advanced basketball competition). However, some of her students were able to participate in activities such as wreath making, bowling, and aerobics classes.

The special education teacher decided to change the scope of her own activity from disability awareness to a "Games for Fun activity" which consisted of New Games (Fluegelman, 1976 and 1981). New Games are actually activities that have been around for years but are redesigned so that anyone can participate. The goal of these games is to have fun and play hard, not to win. New Games are built around software (contained, referred conflict) creative play, trust, and cooperation. They can include two people or hundreds of players and can be altered to involve rule changes and player functions. The games often

include equipment such as pillows, parachutes, earthballs, and boffers (foam rubber swords) that can be used in various ways. New Games have been used to build integration and cooperation across people of all ages, races, and ability levels.

During the first quarter she offered the activity to 10 students from the school, plus four from her class (one continued with an aid to go to another activity). By the third quarter she had opened the activity to 20 nondisabled students in addition to all of her students. Although word did "leak" out, most of the nondisabled students who had signed up for the activity did not know that they would be participating with students who had disabilities. These students' interactions with the students in special education were more natural and spontaneous than the more structured interactions of the nondisabled student classroom volunteers and those who had previously participated in the "Disability Awareness" activity.

Subsequently, several students who had participated in the Games for Fun activity began to eat lunch with the students from the collaborative classroom and interact with them during class breaks. Games for Fun became one of the most popular activities in the school with many students turned away because of limits set on student/teacher ratios.

Lunch Buddies

One of the most natural times to socialize for school-aged youth is at lunch time. Learning how to eat a meal within a typical meal time while "chatting quietly" with others is also an

important prerequisite for participating in independent adult settings such as work sites or restaurants. School lunch periods provide the perfect atmosphere for kids with and without disabilities to learn important social skills as well as to get to know each other.

One way to start this process is to recruit a group of volunteer students who are interested in getting to know kids with disabilities. Some training to this group on the importance of including kids with disabilities in social settings usually helps. It is also a good idea to give these students some specific information on particular students who they may be lunching with. This will enable them to react appropriately to any behavioral outbursts or medical emergencies. Having an adult within "earshot" can also help so that particular questions or problems can be addressed later. Groups of one on one or two to four nondisabled students for each disabled student have worked well.

As students are comfortable with each other, arrangements can be made to have students go to various fast food or more formal restaurants on occasion. This gives all the kids a chance to leave campus and provides a natural community based skills training opportunity for the students with disabilities. One or two teachers or other adults can accompany several groups of students, usually up to fifteen, on an off campus lunch outing. Whenever possible, students should not be required to pay more for lunch than they would at school. Using extra funding

services including classroom materials funds, extra curricula monies that go to clubs, or charitable sources such as Knights of Columbus projects or a PTA bake sale would be appropriate.

Summer Friendship/Outing Groups

Many students with disabilities attend year round school. Going to school during summer months can be a real barrier to recreation program participation since most youth programs occur between June and September. One strategy for getting kids together during the summer is to recruit nondisabled students to participate in summer school programs as part of the leisure domain or physical education curriculum. Students can be recruited during the school year so that schedules for participation can be arranged around jobs, camp, and family vacation. Brochures or "letters to home" for younger children can be helpful recruiting tools since parents are often looking for summer activities to keep their kids healthily occupied. Enabling kids without disabilities to enroll in a special class for entire week long sessions to serve as peer supporters or buddies can provide a much needed day care source for some parents and a perfect source of companionship peer modeling, and fun for the kids with disabilities.

It can be helpful to obtain extra funding or rearrange funding so that the participants spend significant time in community settings. For example, eating lunch at a variety of fast food restaurants, swimming at city or YMCA pools, and learning to read real safety signs in real buildings, streets,

etc. is the practical and natural way to provide education and therapy. This way, kids can learn from peer models and both the kids and staff can get out of the classroom. Older kids can do things that are less structured such as going to movies or hanging out at the mall. More formal outings can include arranged visits to look at future vocational possibilities or trips to learn the local subway or bus system.

Case Study - Day Trippers, A Summer Friendship Group

Six students, aged 16 to 19, diagnosed as having multiple disabilities, participated in this activity. Two of the students used wheelchairs, one used a walker, and all but one had difficulty communicating. All of these students had twelve month IEPs and attended the same special education classroom. This classroom was located at a high school which was a fifteen to sixty minute commute from their home communities. Ten months of the year, the school was occupied by other high school students; in the summer, it was empty except for two classrooms used for a camp for six to twelve year olds.

Several of the high school students who volunteered in the special education classroom throughout the year expressed an interest in getting involved in summer activities with some of the students with disabilities they had gotten to know during the school year. They asked the special education teacher if they could take the students on "Day Trips" to nearby beaches, amusement parks, and places in the city of Boston. Unfortunately, since the students with disabilities had to attend

school all summer, the volunteer students thought that these types of activities would be out of the question.

The teacher was quite excited about the prospect of including her students in some of the local teenager summer "fun spots". However, she had some logistics to take care of first. She needed to make certain that the students' parents would be supportive of such activities and sent information slips and permission forms home. All the parents were excited about their children being included in day trips, and a new group, Day Trippers, was formed. Consulting with the teacher about what the students with disabilities liked and disliked, and utilizing the knowledge they had of the students throughout the year, the high school student volunteers planned one trip per week for a period of six weeks to local teen hang-outs. Public transportation was utilized as well as teacher and parent vehicles for these outings. An adult chaperon was present at the outings but always made an effort to stay in the background.

Although the first Day Trippers group began rather informally, the teacher of the class has since scheduled it in as a regular part of her curriculum and began a registration for local students to become a part of the group each year. Although the participation process has become more formalized, the students remain the main initiators of each trip as they will always know what is "in" for teenagers at any given time.

School Sports Teams

Intramural sports teams exist in most public, private, and post secondary schools. Intramural sports are composed of different teams from the same school who compete against each other for fun and exercise. They tend to be less competitive than most other school sports teams as well as less structured (e.g., playing sites and times may vary, less formal coaching). Intermural (also known as extramural) teams exist primarily on the college and secondary school level are made up of participants from the same school who compete against teams from other schools. These teams tend to be more competitive and more organized. The most competitive types of teams are the inter scholastic teams on the high school level and the collegiate teams who play teams from other schools or colleges. All of these types of teams may provide a forum for an individual with a disability to participate although intra and intermural sports tend to be less competitive than interscholastic/collegiate sports. Alternatively, intra/intermural teams have the flexibility to easily make modifications in rules and regulations so that everyone on the team can participate to the fullest.

Similar options to school sports exist for the student who is older (ages 17 - 21) or the adult in the community. These options include community based teams that are generally sponsored by a local resource such as a church, restaurant, or bar in addition to teams that are specifically associated with a place of employment. Many teams will accept individuals that are

not associated with a specific company or geographic area. Some community recreation providers (e.g., YMCA, recreation department) also offer a variety of leagues that all community members can participate in. These teams are an excellent way for an individual with a disability to develop a social network in their community as well as have a good time.

A School Sports Team Case Study

Michael was a seventeen year old diagnosed as having severe mental retardation. He attended a special class in a high school outside of his district about forty minutes from his home. The school had a prominent athletic program with an especially strong basketball team that had won the state championship. Michael had expressed an interest in making friends and his teacher was able to assist him in meeting students both in his home town and at school. Several of the students that he became friendly with were on the scholastic basketball team at his school and he repeatedly expressed an interest in participating on the team both to his new friends and to his teachers.

Michael's high school had two interscholastic basketball teams, a varsity and junior varsity, which were both highly competitive. Unfortunately, less competitive intramural teams were not available at his school and his teacher felt that it would be impossible for him to participate on a team. Although Michael understood many of the rules of basketball and was able to shoot baskets, he did not have the speed or agility to participate in the very competitive games. However, several of

Michael's new friends were on the junior varsity team and they felt that there must be a team somewhere that would enable Michael to play basketball. They decided to approach their coach about finding another team on which Michael could play.

At the same time Michael's peers were talking to the coach, Michael began talking to his adaptive physical education (APE) teacher about his desire to play basketball. The APE teacher then contacted the coach and the two of them arranged a meeting with Michael. They discussed the possibility of him playing on a less competitive team in his home town at the local YMCA, but found that Michael really wanted to be on the junior varsity team with his new friends. Several days after meeting with Michael, the coach and APE teacher met again and began discussing strategies which would enable Michael to attain his goals.

Transportation immediately became a problem. Michael's program coordinator was very hesitant to try to arrange alternative transportation for Michael as he was nervous that other students would demand it as well. After discussing the issue with Michael's grandmother, she stated that she would be willing to forego Michael's transportation twice a week and pick him up instead. The second barrier met was in the scheduling of basketball practice; the junior varsity team did not always practice right after school and most team members went home and then returned for practice. Michael was able to quickly resolve this problem by asking a member of the team if he could hang out with him until practice (e.g., at his home, at the school store).

Finally, the coach met with Michael and explained to him that he would be able to participate with the team only during warm-up exercises which occurred during the first half hour of each practice. He also explained to Michael why he would not be able to play in the games or during the remaining hour of each practice. They talked about try-outs for the team, and Michael understood that there were many students who wanted to play on the team but who were not skilled enough to make the cut.

After the first two practices, it became evident that Michael did not want to leave after the half hour warm-up. The coach began giving him odd jobs when the warm-ups were over (e.g., giving out towels and water). These responsibilities gradually increased and Michael became a co-manager of the team with another student. In this way, Michael, who was not good enough to be a *playing* member of the team, found an alternative method of team participation and was still accepted as an integral part of the team at both practices and games.

Programs for Older Students (Ages 18-22)

Student receiving special education can stay in school until they are 22 years old while their nondisabled peers or schoolmates with mild disabilities leave school at 18 or younger. Therefore, the older students who are still in school probably do not really have "same-aged" peers at school with whom they can socialize or develop friendships. For these young adults it is important to search outside the high school environment for age-

appropriate relationships. The types of programs described here have worked successfully across the country.

College Fraternities and Sororities. These organizations typically have projects that can include working with "differently" advantaged youth and many are open to participating in some kind of friendship program with a local school. Such a program can be initiated on a college wide basis by working through the school's "Greek" governing council or by approaching individual fraternities or sororities. It usually takes some organizational effort by a teacher or someone very familiar with the older student with disabilities. This person can assist by providing some training and information to the college students on integration, communication, transportation, behavior management, and student history or preferences. Families can assist by providing financial or transportation assistance and all relevant health or medical information. Providing feedback on their son's or daughter's enjoyment of the activity can also help.

Participation in activities can occur in both group and one-on-one situations. Some adult(s) who knows the students with disabilities may need to help match the students with a college partner initially. However, the students should have the freedom to choose partners and activities whenever possible. Slovic, Ferguson, Ferguson, and Johnson (1987) provide some excellent guidelines for starting this kind of social or friendship alliance.

Best Buddies of America. Best Buddies was organized to provide an opportunity for college students and person with mild and moderate mental retardation the chance to become friends. It was started in 1987 by Anthony Kennedy Shriver at Georgetown University. Since then, Best Buddies has expanded to 111 college chapters nationwide with over 4,200 participants. Each college chapter choose an agency or school program that serves adults with disabilities with whom to pair its members. Relationships between members are developed by going to movies, sporting events, concerts, museums, or by just "hanging out" or talking on the phone.

Those interested in starting a college chapter or getting more information can call the national office at 1-800-752-8372.

Tips for Starting "Fun Things"

Get Educated

A number of individuals and organizations have published articles, books, and monographs (see the resource list in this text) outlining how to organize or participate in regular community leisure activities. Other groups have set up information networks that provide access to written materials or organizations that can help with specific issues. It is particularly important for those who are going to facilitate relationships or supervise/sponsor activities to ground themselves in a philosophy that supports their actions and to validate techniques, groups, or events that they may try. This can be achieved by reviewing the research and program

descriptions in the literature related to friendship development and integrated leisure, recreation, and physical education programs. This will also prevent you from "reinventing the wheel" as you tackle the logistics of starting or expanding a program.

Research Your Own Community

If you live in a major metropolitan area of the United States, chances are that some organization is providing some type of opportunity for integrated recreation. Many of the organizations involved in these efforts such as ARC's, Parks and Recreation departments, or the local school system can provide information on possibilities. It is critical to sort out what exists, what is possible in the immediate future, and who is available to help in your efforts. You may find that some agency already has a recreation facilitator or community support professional who is available to help children or adults get involved in leisure activities. If there isn't an existing position, somebody is going to have to either volunteer or be paid to provide support to the kinds of programs described in this paper. It doesn't necessarily take exceptional expertise but it does require some education and lots of commitment.

It is crucial to also understand what people across all ages do for fun during their free time in your particular part of the country. Some things are common for certain ages regardless of which geographical area. For example, most 13 year olds like to

hang out at the local mall. However, cross country skiing is popular only in particular areas where it snows a lot.

Concentrate on Fun

There is no right or wrong way to do any of this. Something may not work in certain communities or with particular people, but you can't loose anything by trying. The neat thing about trying a recreational activity is that you are giving someone another choice. The main objective is to enable the person with a disability the chance to try a number of options and then choose the things that are most fun. Fun and enjoyment are the key elements, not integration, or skill acquisition, or any other outcome! Remembering the following tips can help focus on fun:

- Do the participants laugh and smile or say that they love this?
- Does the participant ask to do it again?
- Have you observed what the participant likes to do with different people in various environments?
- Does the participant get ample opportunities to take part in particular activities so that he or she can really decide how he/she feels about it?
- Does the participant chose this activity when presented with other choices?
- Have you tried different adaptations so that enjoyment or participation is enhanced?

- Do other participants seem to enjoy or at the least accommodate the presence or the participant with a disability?

Don't Worry About Skill Development At First

One of the nicest discoveries that these authors have made over the past three years is that people with very significant disabilities and few recreation skills can still enjoy any number of activities. For example, kids using wheelchairs can participate on soccer teams, adults with no acting experience or even any verbal communication ability can join theater groups, and teens with severe disabilities such as autism and Downs Syndrome can be camp counselors with their peers. The key to successful participation of people who are not as capable, skilled, or prepared as most of the other participants can involve many factors depending on the situation.

First, it is helpful to inform ahead of time the leader or instructor of an activity about the skill level of the person with a disability. It can also help for the leader to then prepare other participants for the involvement of a person with a disability. Meeting the support person ahead of time can also help. This allows for some informal disability awareness training to occur. The support person can also observe the activity and participants and begin to devise modifications or watch for individuals who may be particularly helpful to or fearful of the new participant. Continual positive communication with participants so that they understand the skill and

behavioral limitations of the participant who is disabled is essential.

Second, ongoing support from a skilled peer, volunteer, or recreational professional can make up for the lack of skill from the participant. Therefore, arrangements have to made by someone to provide support for as long as is necessary. Families and others cannot just assume that people with disabilities should be accepted into all recreational situations, especially those that involve competition or particular motor skills or artistic talent.

Third, skill development can be accomplished through various outside means. Families and teachers can work with a participant on an activity during school hours or at home during evening or weekend hours. As well, volunteers can be recruited to spend extra time practicing with the participant. We have found many people from classes or sport teams who express a desire to spend extra time with someone who has a disability. In some cases, skill level will never increase anyway, so working out partial participation methods or rule or equipment adaptations may be necessary.

Be Prepared for Any Outcome and Don't Worry About Failing

Integrated community recreation and leisure participation for people with significant disabilities is a relatively new concept. We have much less research or best practice data in this area as compared to the other life skill areas such as the domestic and vocational domains. In other words, we are all

still at the point of trying anything and everything so long as participants seem to enjoy the effort. It's OK to make mistakes in the process as long as you are willing to try again and again and again! You have to be ready to discuss with the public people's "differences" on a continuing basis while at the same time you have to make quick judgements about stopping some participant's involvement when behavior problems or attitudes of others becomes a barrier. You have to keep looking for activities, volunteers, and accepting program directors, and while doing this you have to support families and encourage their risk taking. It's an incredible job but none could be more rewarding or fun when you see someone making a friend, playing a new sport, or learning a new hobby.

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FRIENDSHIP CLUB

FRIENDSHIP IS AS LASTING AS THE MOON

The Training and Research Institute at Children's Hospital is working to get students with special needs together with other students for fun and friendship. Staff accompanies and assists all those involved so that everyone learns, grows and most importantly, has fun.

The following are some ideas how you can participate. These ideas are based on the interests expressed by students with special needs from several communities. We would like you to read through these suggestions, think about any that would be of interest, and see if you can come up with any other things that you think would be fun to try.

- A group that goes to concerts, movies, or the theater on a regular basis.
- Spending one afternoon a week with a student hanging out, going to the mall, going out to eat, or participating with them in some sort of structured community programming like the programs offered through a local community recreation provider.
- Going to a class with someone in your school or nearby school to act as a peer tutor.
- Going with someone to an after-school activity that you already participate in like the band, chorus, or an organized sport.
- An environmental group that organizes and participates in cleanups of areas in your community.
- Acting as a big brother or big sister to a younger student in your community or surrounding area.

Does any of this look like fun to you? Can you think of other things that you think would be fun to try?

If this looks interesting to you, please call **Robin Friedlander or Cheska Komissar (735-6914)** or talk to your school representative.